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TAGS: [AMGT](#) [CM](#) [KCOR](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE: ALL HANDS ENGAGED IN
ANTI-CORRUPTION FIGHT

REF: A. YAOUNDE 800
[1](#)B. YAOUNDE 784
[1](#)C. YAOUNDE 546

Classified By: Political officer Tad Brown for reasons 1.4 b and d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: All elements of the U.S. Mission to Cameroon are engaged in aggressively fighting corruption and promoting good governance in Cameroon, a paramount USG objective inextricably linked to strengthening democratic institutions and furthering economic development. With no corruption program budget, we have used public outreach (including Ambassadorial speeches and off-the-record briefings), consular tools, law enforcement collaboration and management techniques to send a clear message: backing rhetoric with action, the USG will play a transformative role in fighting corruption in Cameroon. Cameroonians, including some members of government, have applauded this engagement and hailed the USG's efforts to transform Cameroon's war against corruption from a battle of words to a campaign of action. A string of high profile arrests and more open discussion of corruption suggests our efforts are having an impact. End summary.

The Corruption Context

[1](#)2. (SBU) Cameroon is seen--by foreign observers and Cameroonians themselves--as among the most corrupt countries in the world. From the gendarmes who erect road check points to demand bribes--not check vehicles (they are known as "mange mille" for their appetite for 1,000 CFA (about \$2) bills)--to paragons of grand corruption (former Finance Minister Abah Abah's ill-gotten fortune is reputed to approach \$1 billion), corruption is pervasive in Cameroon. Transparency International's (TI) Corruption Perception Index ranks Cameroon 138 out of 179 countries surveyed, and a 2007 survey under TI's auspices found that 80% of Cameroonian households had paid a bribe within the preceding 12 months. The Minister of Justice estimates that 70 cents out of each dollar in the budget is stolen. cursory reviews of the purchases made with funds from debt forgiveness (the Highly-Indebted Poor Countries or HIPC process) indicate that corruption and governance remain problematic; government officials stole money from line items that were extraneous in the first place (skimming money from a contract for expensive office furniture, for example).

Law Enforcement: Bad Guys Behind Bars

[1](#)3. (SBU) Drawing on materials provided by the International Law Enforcement Academies (ILEA), members of the Regional Security Office (RSO) conducted a three-day course in professional ethics to approximately 150 police officers

assigned to the Diplomatic Security Unit. The RSO and Consular Section, working in close collaboration with local law enforcement officials, have seen to the arrest of approximately 140 individuals who committed or abetted fraudulent activity.

Training the Watchdog: Media Outreach

¶4. (SBU) Yaounde's Public Affairs Office (PAO) worked with a former Alfred Friendly fellowship winner to conduct a workshop that instructed Cameroonian journalists on the proper methods of investigative journalism, an effort that will likely lead to establishment of a center for investigative journalism in the provincial capital of Bamenda. The PAO is supporting a meeting of Cameroon's journalists' association (CAMASEJ) that will focus on the need to eliminate corruption among journalists, many of whom have grown accustomed to accepting bribes (called "gombo") in exchange for writing flattering stories. (Note: Corruption in journalism has a direct impact on the US; our experience with fraudulent asylum applications shows that prospective beneficiaries plant false stories in the Cameroonian press in order to convince a US immigration judge that their fear of persecution is real. End note.) A similar message will be conveyed, with PAO support, to the General Assembly of the Cameroon Media Council later this year. In late-September, PAO will host a DVC conversation with journalists in Douala, focusing on basic principles of transparency.

Speaking Out: The Ambassador's Role

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¶5. (SBU) The Ambassador has taken advantage of her public profile in Cameroon to deliver frank assessments of corruption and poor governance. For example, speaking in April to a gathering of students at Cameroon's Institute for Management, the Ambassador encouraged the graduating class of future government officials to take their public service seriously, cautioning that "corruption undermines the confidence of the international community and investors who would want to come and increased the potential wealth of Cameroon."

Speaking Frankly in Private Diplomacy

¶6. (C) The Ambassador and other Emboffs have delivered frank anti-corruption messages to GRC officials and other influential actors. In her conversations with President Biya, Ambassador has emphasized the need to tackle institutional corruption and praised those GRC officials who have improved governance in their agencies. Emboffs have raised concerns about corruption--including specific corrupt officials--in meetings with public servants at all levels, from ministers to working-level officials. In a September 18 meeting with Yaounde Archbishop Takot, Ambassador emphasized the need for civil society to pressure the GRC on anti-corruption issues.

Management: The Power of the Good Example

¶7. (SBU) As the Embassy unit that engages in business transactions with the Cameroonian public, the Management Section has explicitly sought to provide a model of good governance through its behavior. For example, Cameroon's Director of Customs lavished praise on the Management Section's decision to invite customs officials to attend the public sale of Embassy property, ensuring that proper duties are paid and collected on items sold. The Management Section is cognizant of the demonstrative impact it can have by conducting proper tender offers. In awarding the tender for upkeep of the Embassy grounds, for example, the Management

Section went through special effort to ensure the process was transparent; the incumbent company (which lost) and a female entrepreneur (who won) both professed surprise that the process had been so open and competitive. In a similar vein, the Embassy returned a number of contributions to the July 4 celebration, including letters and verbal explanations for why the contributions did not fit within closely prescribed regulations for the event. Similarly, Poloffs have devoted substantial time and energy to prevent and root out corruption and bad governance in USG Food for Progress programs worth approximately \$20 million.

A Team Effort: Proclamation 7750

18. (C) Working as an informal task force that encompasses the Front Office, Pol-Econ, Consular, Public Affairs and the DAO, Embassy Yaounde has implemented Proclamation 7750 aggressively; subjects of SAO requests in the last two years include the former Minister of Finance, the head of a large parastatal, the current Minister of Defense and a senior official engaged in the mining sector. Post has leveraged 212f ineligibilities to force the GRC's hand in removing a corrupt minister and in preventing another corrupt official from fleeing Cameroonian justice and seeking refuge in the U.S.

9.(SBU) Post has used Proclamation 7750 to put the USG's commitment to anti-corruption on the front page of Cameroon's news. The Ambassador hosted a lunch with local journalists to educate them on the Proclamation 7750 and the USG's determination to deny safe haven to corrupt officials and their ill-gotten gains, an outreach effort that resulted in scores of high profile, universally popular stories hailing the USG's policy. The publicity has sent a jolt through Cameroon's corrupt cadres: journalists reported that Cabinet officials called them, asking if their names were among those "black-listed," and Cameroon's most prominent businessman (embroiled in numerous corruption allegations) approached the Embassy to "tell all" and deliver a duffel bag filled with incriminating documents, which he apparently hoped would keep him off our 212f list (septel).

Corruption in the Armed Forces

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10. (C) Recognizing that pervasive corruption in Cameroon's armed forces poses a critical threat to American interests in Cameroon and the region, on September 8-12, Yaounde's Defense Attache Office brought corruption experts from the Defense Institute of International Legal Studies (DIILS) to conduct a four-day seminar on corruption in the armed forces. Cameroon's media provided heavy coverage of the conference, especially the Ambassador's remarks at the opening ceremony. The Ambassador quoted members of Cameroon's armed forces who have reported that "it is normal for senior officials to skim from the military budget to build themselves fancy homes or throw elaborate parties. They have said it is normal for troops in the field to go without their proper food or health benefits because the money never reached them."

11. (C) Minister of Defense Remy Ze Meka, himself one of Cameroon's most corrupt officials, telephoned the Defense Attache to express his displeasure that corruption in the military was in the spotlight; the military's rank-and-file, press reports, and other government officials with whom we spoke were, however, unanimously grateful for the conference, and President Biya had expressed his support for the concept when the Ambassador proposed it during their August 7 conversations (refs a and b).

12. (SBU) In providing dozens of training opportunities to members of Cameroon's armed forces, the DAO emphasizes the need to improve governance and professionalism in the

military. Recipients of training in the coming months will include the Secretary General at the Ministry of Defense and a member of the National Assembly Armed Forces Committee.

Strengthening the Watchdogs

¶13. (C) Post used terrorist finance demarches to cultivate a very close relationship with ANIF, the GRC's primary anti-money laundering agency. When ANIF was feeling beleaguered by threats and pressure from powerful, corrupt officials, the Ambassador urged President Biya to lend his support to the organization, which helped provide it much-needed cover. We worked with FINCEN and the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security to organize a week of consultations for ANIF officials in Washington; in October, USG officials from FINCEN and USDOJ will come to Cameroon for follow-on training and for consultations with ANIF and the Ministry of Justice on how to implement a Mutual Legal Assistance agreement - all organized and financed by post.

Engaging Business

¶14. (C) The Embassy has been vigilant in working to ensure that the USG and American citizens do not run afoul of the governance precepts we preach, especially through enforcement of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA). When an American company complained that the GRC was not fulfilling its contractual obligations, Poloff reviewed the contract, discovered a number of suspicious clauses, and encouraged the GRC to review the case to ensure bribery and corruption were not involved. Having received information suggesting that a multinational firm traded on the NYSE may have paid bribes and practiced trade-based money-laundering, post provided the relevant details to investigators with the Security and Exchange Commission (SEC) for follow-up, which is on-going. Speaking at the September 9 meeting of the American Chamber of Commerce, Poloff offered to help American companies faced with bribery attempts, but also cautioned them to respect their obligations under FCPA and other relevant American laws.

Comment: Transformational Diplomacy,
Yielding Results

¶15. (C) Corruption in Cameroon has become so pervasive that it threatens to undermine the USG's objectives in Cameroon; not just the three leading MSP goals (democracy, development and stability), but an entire range of policy priorities, including biodiversity, commercial outreach, AGOA, and avian influenza. The size and scope of the problem--and the stakes--are such that an "all hands" approach is necessary. Working as a Mission and with negligible resources, AmEmbassy Yaounde has helped transform Cameroon's anti-corruption effort from a series of slogans and promises to one of the more dynamic anti-corruption campaigns in the region.

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¶16. (C) We have begun to transform the corruption paradigm, generating a greater emphasis on results, although a great deal of work remains to be done. While it is difficult to gauge the relative impact of USG pressure, the GRC's "Operation Epervier" (Operation Sparrowhawk, an anti-corruption campaign) has had some significant successes over the past year. The government arrested the highly corrupt former Ministers of Finance and Health, the Director and Paymaster of Douala Port, the former Secretary General at the Presidency, and many lower level officials. Prominent figures like wealthy businessman Yves Michel Fotso are holding press conferences to proclaim their innocence in corruption scandals. The "Albatross Affair," a case of high-level corruption related to the purchase of a presidential plane (ref c) has resurfaced and continues to make headlines. Local contacts believe that former Cameroon

Ambassador to the U.S. Jerome Mendouga has vanished for fear of corruption-related prosecution.

¶17. (C) Many government critics point out that, despite arresting several big fish, the GRC has done little to change a system which perpetuates corruption or to go after the smaller fry who harass average people on a daily basis. They argue that Operation Eparvier is driven by politics more than anti-corruption zeal. All of this is true; anti-corruption efforts are being played out against a backdrop of complex politics as power brokers vie to influence a future post-Biya succession scenario. Cameroon has much work ahead of it to turn the tide of its corrosive corruption. However, even these critics are surprised at the scope of the government's recent arrests. Cameroonians are eager to recover the proceeds of officials who took their money out of the country, a priority which many would say trumps arresting the big perpetrators.

¶18. (C) The USG is seen, by the GRC and its critics, as the main advocate for good governance in Cameroon. Post appreciates Washington support in this effort as we continue to look for ways and for resources to keep up the pressure on the GRC. With negligible resources for anti-corruption programming, our efforts thus far have relied on creativity and activism. If and when Washington is able to make available resources for anti-corruption programs (as requested in Post's MSP and Operation Plans), Post's efforts--and impact--will grow substantially.

GARVEY